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LETTER DATED 17 MAY 1999 FROM THE CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES A.I.
OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF IRAQ TO THE UNITED NATIONS
ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a letter dated 16 May 1999 from Mr. Mohammed Said Al-Sahaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, responding to the statement made to the press by Mr. Benon V. Sevan, Executive Director of the Office of the Iraq Programme, concerning medicines and medical supplies and equipment. With the support of documentation and figures, the letter affirms that inadequate implementation in the health sector is due to the actions taken and the positions adopted by the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom in the Security Council Committee established by resolution 661 (1990).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Rokan Hama AL-ANBUGE
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex

Letter dated 16 May 1999 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq addressed to the Secretary-General

We have considered the statement concerning the medication and medical supplies sector that was made to the press on 12 May 1999 by Mr. Benon V. Sevan, Executive Director of the Office of the Iraq Programme at the United Nations in New York, and we should like in this connection to make the comments set forth hereunder.

1. The total value of the medicines and medical supplies and equipment that have thus far arrived in Iraq is $575,300,000. Medicines account for $313,361,000 of this total, and more than 75 per cent of these medicines have been distributed to health-care institutions. The remainder are still in the warehouses because of the need to conduct pharmaceutical control tests or because there are problems with the supplier concerning quality or specifications. It should be said that some quantities are now in the distribution stage, and that distribution takes place in accordance with a system and an approved timetable. This is monitored on a periodic basis by the relevant observers from the World Health Organization (WHO). More than 50 per cent of the remaining sum, that is to say of the $262 million remaining from the aforesaid total of $575,300,000, represents the value of the medical supplies that have been delivered. These include surgical gloves, syringes, sutures, laboratory preparations, dressings and X-ray film and related supplies. It is thus that the Ministry of Health laid the proper foundations for the importation of medicines and medical supplies under the five purchase and distribution plans submitted. In connection with the other 50 per cent, spare parts for existing medical equipment and new medical equipment have been imported, the importation of these items having been adversely affected by the unjust embargo imposed nearly nine years ago, given that they are to be regarded as integral to the diagnostic process. This is because treatment of the required standard cannot be provided unless there has first been a precise diagnosis, and these items are therefore no less essential than the medicines themselves.

2. We should like to remind Mr. Sevan that the sum allocated to the health sector over all five phases has been $1,029 million and that we are still awaiting delivery of more than 42 per cent of the essential and life-saving drugs as well as the medical supplies and equipment ordered. A large percentage of this sum has not been used because of the defective and complex procedures of the 661 Committee. Mr. Sevan would have been better advised to call attention to the large quantities of items that have yet to reach Iraq and to the contracts whose approval has been blocked or rejected, on flimsy grounds, by the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom, so that the sick in Iraq have been unable to benefit from them. It thus transpires that the reason for the bottlenecks is not the procedures of the Iraqi Ministry of Health but the actions of the Committee and the practices of some of its members.

3. Our foregoing assertions were carefully investigated by the representatives of the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and of WHO headquarters

who visited Iraq between 12 and 27 March 1999 and submitted a report giving their field observations of the health-related warehouses and health-care institutions in Iraq. The report clearly demonstrates the opposite of Mr. Sevan's statement, which lacks precision and objectivity, and it bears out our assertions in the preceding paragraphs.

Mr. Sevan's statements are not based on the objective facts, which prove that the oil-for-food programme has failed to meet the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. The attempt by the Office of the Iraq Programme to cover up the established bottlenecks by casting blame on others and assigning responsibility to the relevant Iraqi authorities for the delayed arrival of items imported under the oil-for-food programme, including those for the health sector, cannot be characterized as showing objectivity.

In this letter, we have tried to elucidate the true state of affairs by means of an objective refutation that is documented and supported by figures and we have done so in order to prove that what we have maintained is true. We leave it to you to decide the credibility of what we have said.

(Signed) Mohammed Said AL-SAHAF
Minister for Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Iraq